

**LEGO-LEGO OF ALOR PEOPLE IN EAST NUSA TENGGARA, INDONESIA:
THE EXPRESSION OF ANCESTOR'S EXPERIENCE AND LANGUAGE
MAINTENANCE**

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Abstract

Lego-lego is *pantun* (an oral traditional poetry) sung to accompany a circle dance done massively in Alor-Pantar Island, East Nusa Tenggara. All ethnic groups in Alor-Pantar know *lego-lego* as one of their traditional arts. Initially the medium of expression of *lego-lego* is ritual language in the form of archaic languages. In further development, *lego-lego* is spoken with languages from various ethnic in Alor-Pantar Island in a poetic manner. Nowadays many young generation in Alor-Pantar do not understand the use of archaic language in *lego-lego* anymore.

In fact there are two papers that discussed *lego-lego*, namely Bouman (1943) and Rodemeier (1993). But they do not discuss specifically *lego-lego* of Kui people and *lego-lego* as a culture practice in their language environment too. They more concentrate on *lego-lego* in general based on the place that is associated with the social function and the social structure. Meanwhile, Rodemeier talks about *lego-lego* in the rites of death. By using performance ethnography through field research, this paper aims 1) to describe *lego-lego* of Kui people in their cultural context; 2) to explore the maintenance of *lego-lego* in their language ecology.

Key words: *lego-lego*, Kui, Alor, oral tradition, language ecology

Introduction

This paper discusses about *lego-lego* as one of oral traditions of Kui people in Alor, in the context of a language which is threatened with extinction. I would like to say that this paper is not the final result of a research, but this is the beginning of a research on *lego-lego* in Kui language in order to document and revitalize Kui language.

It is important to make a study on the oral tradition of Kui people since Kui people do not have written system and there is no written paper about them. Therefore, Kui people use oral language to communicate and persevere the intangible heritage. Theoretically, Robins (1989:490) states that in the field research, a researcher of linguistic anthropology like or not, has to deal with all aspects of language; for example oral texts. Oral texts are described as some utterances which are not the researcher's direct responses. Some oral texts, whatever

their formats are, express a part of their speaker's culture and tradition. Traditional stories and songs, mythology, group history, some utterances in traditional and religious ceremonies, and verbal arts are examples of materials which can be uniquely collected and analyzed by a linguist. The significance of oral texts, even can be far exceeded its linguistic boundary (Robins 1989: 493). The statement means that the analysis of oral text not only can be used to describe language system, but also to comprehend their culture through a study on both micro-linguistic and macro-linguistic, even interdisciplinary.

Considering the close relationship between oral tradition safeguarding and language, *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003) said that one of the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage was the actualization of oral tradition, including language as an intangible cultural heritage. Thus, the effort of saving local languages cannot put aside the oral tradition in the local language community.

Based on a research result in East Africa done by Mhando (2008: 39), a close connection between saving or persevering oral tradition and local languages has been found. The reason is a language extinction means an extinction of unique language characteristic. Finally, it will result on not only decreasing, but vanishing oral tradition. It could impact on local sensibility in the community.

Beside conveying historical experience, language arranges, perseveres and shows a sensibility of different local languages. That is the importance of revitalizing and persevering local languages. One of the methods is by documenting and studying on oral tradition.

There are two previous papers about lego. Those papers connect directly with lego-lego, although they do not discuss about Kui people's lego-lego. First, Bouman (1943) writes "De Aloreesche Dansplaat," in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indie*, Deel 102, 3de/4de Afl. (1943), page 481-500. This paper is about Alor's ethnography in its era so that primitive term in some aspects is used by Bouman. Before discussing about *lego-lego*, Bouman describes geographically characteristic of Alor islands. There are some ethnic groups, language classifications, and the life of Alor people who depended too much on nature.

Bouman explains that at the beginning *lego-lego* was the show of respect given to ancestor's spirit, so that it was sacred. However, the ritual meaning of *lego-lego* is ineffective now. This is a process which happens because of three matters; (1) Islamic influence, (2) Christianizing, (3) land cultivation. Bouman describes *lego-lego* with its places, their connection with village opening, and its function as relationship signs.

Second, Rodemeier (1993) writes "*Lego-lego Plattzt und Naga-Darstellung.*" This writing is a magister thesis in Munchen University, Germany. It discusses about Alor's *lego-lego* in death rituality. Therefore, it talks about ritual dance, instruments, the instrument location (*gong* and *moko*), dancers, ritual place, and *lego-lego* participants. Some of them are connected with ancestor's spirit and journey, mythology, genealogy, and also some supernatural power which cannot be seen in sacred places.

My paper, in this case, is different with those two papers because I discuss about *lego-lego* as a performance which takes a position in the language of Kui people. After that, this paper talks about some effort in persevering *lego-lego* oral tradition in order to persevering Kui language.

Kui People and Their Spreading

At the beginning Kui native speaker lived in *Lerabaing*, which means 'King's village' as the first village. In this village Kui ancestor's remains have been kept, some of them are ship fragments which is believed to be used by their ancestor to reach the village, a mosque which was founded in 1600, and the ex house of Kui King. The logical analysis of Kui people about *Lerabaing* 'King's village' as a public area could be used to reconstruct main component of individual identity and group, and to comprehend how every group interact in economics cooperation, political hierarchy, jobs distribution and ritual assignment.

Now Kui people are spread in three different areas; namely, *Lerabaing*, *Buraga-Bombaru*, and in *Moru*. These three villages are in the area of South-West Alor District, Alor Regency. In *Lerabaing* as the old village there are only 20 houses left now or 119 people. The rest are in *Bombaru-Buraga* 78 houses or 315 people and in *Moru* there are 87 houses or 399 people. Thus, the number of people in Kui are only around 833 now.

Unfortunately, not all Kui people master Kui language. The research result shows the movement of Kui language into Alor Malay. Kui people in the group of 1-25 years and 26-50 years do not use Kui language in communication among their family, neighborhood, and friends. Besides, language transmission in Kui language community hasn't run very well anymore. The high number of mixed marriage creates more speed of Kui language movement (Katubi 2011).

Kui people now live in multiethnic. The lives of Kui people which are spread in three areas are mixed up with people of Klon, Abui, and Hamap. There is a *lingua franca* which is used for communication among Kui people, Alor Malay. Therefore, some of Kui people live in diglossic circle, that is the language choice of some various domains because their ecology circle might choose a language.

Kui people classify themselves into four groups which they call *lelang*. In Alor Malay it is translated into 'suku' while in Indonesian it can be translated into 'klan'. The four *lelang* in Kui are *Ler* (King klan), *Kuilelang*, *Kaletowas*, and *Malangkabat*. Every *lelang* has its own task. *Ler* (King tribe) has a responsibility to manage a village. *Kuilelang* owns a task to accompany King tribe to give advice about government regulations. *Kaletowas* gets a task to guard security or war troop. *Malangkabat* handles religious tasks. Social structure in Kui people is set up from mythology of Kui people establishment. Then, the social structure influences other aspects; such as, marriage rules and in performing oral tradition like *lego-lego* and *luire*.

Lego-lego: The Analysis of Term and Genre

Lego-lego in Kui language is called *dar*, which means 'song'. That is different from *towen* which means 'dancing'. Therefore, *lego-lego* in oral tradition of Kui people is classified as folk genre (*folk song*). Kui people define *lego-lego* as a song for accompanying circle dance.

As a folk song, *lego-lego* is musical genre based on ethnic. It is frequently performed in small performing concept which is described by Titon (1992: 168), *lego-lego* as a folk song can be assumed as a performance, not just a song text.

Lego-lego as a folk song reflects Kui people experiences all together which share the history of Kui people, their social status among some clans which have formed them, cultural values, ethnic heritage, affiliates of religion (for example an oral traditional poetry of a child whose together).

Lego-lego as a folk song is an event when Kui people all together share their experiences in various themes. Most of Kui people take an active part, interact as listeners, actors, singers, and dancers because *lego-lego* wants all people to be active to sing and dance. This is not like in Western art performances. They separate between actors and audiences. In *lego-lego*, people are able to be in and out during performances.

The Setting: Time and Place of *Lego-lego*

The time of *lego-lego* performances cannot be decided because they are not scheduled like formal festival. It usually depends on the existence of event or not to perform *lego-lego*, such as; wedding ceremony, building up a mosque, winner celebration in competition, harvest fiest, and etc. Watching its performance, *lego-lego* for Kui people is a fun performance. Thus, there is no *lego-lego* for funeral and other sad events.

Lego-lego can be done within some hours until late at night; from evening until morning, even till the other noon. The event of *lego-lego* starts with an opening which called *dartuki*. It is an announcement that there will be *lego-lego* in the evening or at night. It starts with beating a gong and drums three times which is called *sarosok*. The musical instruments in *lego-lego* are two gongs (*bubu*) and drums (*padang*).

According to Bauman (1992: 45), one of the main direction which showing a performance is breaking situation, a stage. In the past a stage of *lego-lego* for Kui people is the universe with *mesbah* in the center. It is a stone as a place of worship to ancestors. Participants in *lego-lego* are singing and dancing around *mesbah*. However, after the arrival of Islamic Religion (also Christianity and Chatolic for other ethnic groups), the stage of *lego-lego* performance is spacious place for *lego-lego* has mass characteristics and some parts have never used *mesbah* as the center. It causes *lego-lego* usually to be performed by the sea, in wide yard, even in front of mosques with spacious yard. Not like the stage of *lego-lego*, the stage of other performances does need a truly high artificial stage. The universe is a stage for Kui people.

The Participants of *Lego-lego* and The Social Structure of Kui People

Participant, both men and women, hold their hands together through their ring fingers and form a designs of its clan. It is forbidden to wear wrong designs of clothes among the groups because it will create a social sanction.

The first person becoming a pole in forming *lego-lego* center is called *surlael* while the last person closing is *alapelel*. Another participant has to slip in *surlael* and *alapelel*. They become the main roles of *lego-lego* as the starting point and the ending. Participants are not allowed to enter without slipping them in. The participant becoming *surlael* ought to be from *kaletowas* while *apalel* ought to be from *malangkabat*. People from other clans are not allowed to be in their positions. That is based on the mythology of Kui people and task distribution in each clan. *Katewos* clan is given a task to be *surlael* or leader in *lego-lego* because structurally *Katewos* clan gets a task the War Leader. On the other hand, *Malangkabat* clan takes a role as *alapelel* or circle closing in *lego-lego* because *Malangkabat* clan become the War Troop in outside circle.

Not every person, even *Kaletowas* clan can be *surlael*. It is inherited to younger or older brother or children. However, all need “proper value” which is in Kui language called *unkur*. It fits with requirements and is proper. The person who will inherit as a *surlael* has been tried to lead *lego-lego*. He is watched out by the heir. If it seems proper, the role of leader will be given to the heir. But, if it does not, the heir will find another person who still comes from *kaletowas* clan to lead *lego-lego* as a trial.

The above exposition tells us that singing in *lego-lego* becomes cultural practice. It has a functional implication in distributing clan tasks and collective narration of the history.

The Lyrics in *Lego-Lego*

The opening song of *lego-lego* is called *ilero*. Then, it is continued by a song of content called *buidesi*, and ended by a closing song, *sele-sele kai*. The differences among the three lay on sound of drums, songs and steps (*ulak*) of dance. Sounds in *ilero*, especially in drums, is made quite multiplied, while in *buidesi* the sounds of drums seem to be normal. Besides, in *sele-selekai* the sounds are more rapidly made in order to encourage the spirit and expose

how they are happy , since they have been successful in performing *lego-lego*. The differences in the songs among the three are in the content and the number of songs. The songs in *ilero* are mostly five songs only. Its content is to persuade people to enter the circle together because *lego-lego* is going to start immediately. The songs in *buidesi* can reach 15-20 songs. They consist of various content, from advice to the journey of their ancestors. Moreover, in *sele-sele kai* there is only one song sung.

The lyrics which are sung in *lego-lego*; such as,

Bui desi tani mai bala tani mai
Ye yeri nangal goi yeri nangal goi
Push the betel chewing pan quickly push
Laughing, why laughing

Mei gargi nen gargi asal bui bangi
Bui bangi liki nanga ua liki nanga
Husband in the house and wife in the house ask how they feel
Ask their feeling each other, not being angry

E palin detimasi awe punu laki
Punu laki noka sinde nange awe punulaki
Sign in your eyes let me help to show the way
Show the way to succeed or not let me show first

Mei gargi nen gargi lai usalaka
Usalaka laka bei egupuntaney
Wife in the house and husband in the house help each other
In fact you're there let's help each other

Masin lake puna laki mura bata kela
Kitan laki migamani tena migamani
With the Masin language actually it is a good story
But as the r who the representative circulate the ranks among us

Ko bus manaka noka miarang gosisi
Mira sei gomola kuli gomola
Having already opened the soft screwpine mat to wait for
But the representative who sits on the throne isn't willing to descend

E yol mei setan oa bangan gei
E il ela o gataka nanga
A girl is not good to choose another man
You don't know the history of your life

Pitawom ta wong tamiri muru tata nian
Kowa-kowa ugapai tai susa bata
Mutual love creates a safe family
But, if it is forced, of course, it will create problems

E tawon non jalga lak targi mia
Balo laki mai balo ubagibi nanga
Two people have put an agreement
Please don't care of whoever are trying to influence

Bura bata-bata mia onatan manesi
Lamu bata-bata la owa nomasori
In open area even you dare to hold my hand
Wherever we meet you dare to talk to me

Ol non dela masi desa roko pana
Ol moi kana kolo dosa gapu nanga
A boy who is fairly skin, handsome and rich
A girl who is sweet and poor

Mei pak ganaya mei lake usalaka
Mei dali Sali mei lake gowananga
A village girl surely has several traditions
But, a girl from outside has not

Kena kapa suku nuku ai morin tani
Morin tani tegawari tani tegawari
Every gift even a piece of cloth should be well-kept
If it is well-kept, it means knowing relatives

Siri mai ona pata welu mibirogi
Mibarogi laki yai sei laki yai
Every secret is being whispered
A good whisper is forbidden to share

Mara kare koi aloma aloma punu regi meli
Otapata punuta isi punuta
Every good advice given should be kept in the heart
All good advice should be kept in the heart and applied in daily life

Every change from one song to another is followed by changing footsteps following the sounds of drums. The lyrics in the song content some advice and also the story of their ancestor's journey, which is inherited from generation to other generation. Thus, the lyrics of *lego-lego* in traditional ceremonies are fixed lyrics. Those are traditional *lego-lego*. However, it allows to create new lyrics which are adjusted with situation, such as; welcoming guests, so

a lyric concerning with the guests are created. The new lyrics are created collectively by some people, so that there is no individual creation entering the lyrics of *lego-lego*.

The words using in *lego-lego* lyrics are chosen words being assumed to possess esthetical values. They are different from the daily language. For example; *tempat sirih* in Kui language is *buibakal*, while in *lego-lego* it is *buidesi tanimai*.

The Recent Condition of *Lego-lego* of Kui People

It said that to understand the transmission process and the ability of recent generation perform *lego-lego*, people hold *Focus Group Discussion* (FGD). All information in Lerabaing, Buraga, and also Moru when FGD held, is reported that young generation under 20 years old are not able to sing *lego-lego* lyrics anymore. If they are in the center of *lego-lego*, they follow the old people to sing. On the other hand, if they are asked to do *lego-lego*, they cannot do it. The young generation is considered not to be able to sing *lego-lego*, except; the old people.

In accordance with some information, the recent young generation loves “joget” with single keyboard more or loud music which is played in the taper recorder. There hasn’t been understood the reasons why they shift their interests.

Moreover, some young generation start to compare between *lego-lego* and joget which is connected with Islamic religion lessons; especially, it is forbidden for men to touch women not their *muhrim*. In this aspect, for some young Kui people *lego-lego* does not fit with Islamic religion because this performance lets them make a circle and touch each other, in this case, the same sex or different ones. When people make a circle in the dancing and singing, all *lego-lego* participants connect their each other ring fingers with the body postures close to each other.

of view touching different sex in *lego-lego* is forbidden. On the other hand, tradition comes before the religious lessons of Islam and acted as a part of inherited tradition.

That controversy and also the stopping transmission of *lego-lego* to the young people and children, brings *lego-lego* to be possessed by the old people only. This condition can be detected as the ending of maintaining one of oral traditions of Kui people. It is just like the ending of maintaining their language.

In fact, this clog of the transmission of oral tradition of Kui people doesn't only exist in *lego-lego*, but also in folk stories, children songs and games.

There is no child recognizing them anymore. Moreover, some old young people do not remember anymore.

Transmission and Learning

Actually there is no formal procedure performed by Kui people to transmit *lego-lego* to the younger generation because for the Kui people, *lego-lego* is a social activity and cultural practices. Children and adolescents learn *lego-lego* through observation and imitation. On the sidelines of the implementation of the *lego-lego*, children try to practice *lego-lego*. Usually there will be adults who pay attention and correct if errors occur. The question is whether they know the meaning of each verse is sung in a *lego-lego*? Because *lego-lego* using archaic language, many of the Kui people themselves who do not know what it means, but they can sing. I found a few people over the age of 50 years who is very active singing, both solo and together, when implementing *lego-lego*, but they do not know the meaning of the song.

So, the steps being taken in general is well observed the adults who are doing *lego-lego*; remember, both the words and melody, trying with peers or older adults; getting feedback from adults *lego-lego* knows well, and try again. Sometimes, children practice skills in the back loop when the adults were doing *lego-lego*.

Oral Tradition of *Lego-lego* and Language Maintenance

My preliminary research show that there is indication of a language shift of the Kui people, whether they live in Wakapsir, Buraga & Bombaru and Moru. The 1-25 year age group of Kui people have started do not use Kui language in the family domain. In fact, in neighborhood domain and friendship domain, Kui children no longer use Kui language. Their switch to Alor Malay. If the family domain as the basis of language maintenance "has been leaked," it means the base language maintenance is faltering. Leaking language maintenance in the domain of the most basic is followed in the neighborhood domain.

Language shift is also evident in the use of language in the religion domain. Some activities such as religious ceremony during Friday prayers at the mosque and completing the Qur'aan

are all using the Indonesian language. Invitations and announcements for a given religious activities in the Indonesian language.

The use of language in the life cycle of the ceremony seemed to reinforce the Kui language shift. Marriage ceremonies and funeral ceremonies use Indonesian language. In the marriage ceremony, especially intermarrying, all activities using the Indonesian language. Meanwhile, the marriage ceremony involving both families of Kui ethnic group, only the handover ceremony alone Kui language. After that, all the conversations made using Alor Malay.

Meanwhile, all the activities at the funerals ceremony carried out by using the Indonesian language. All announcements, greeting, and conversation at the funeral was conducted in the Indonesian language.

The question is whether the *lego-lego* and other types of oral tradition has a function in Kui language maintenance? Of course, the oral tradition of *lego-lego* support Kui language maintenance in terms of the different functions of language. Analysis of language shift and maintenance have only reviewed the use of everyday language or vernacular function, namely language as a means of communication within a group of people (eg, ethnic groups). In fact, there is another function of language, namely vehicular function, as a means of communication in the areas of administrative, legal and / or political, or communication between different language groups (eg, ethnic groups or between countries); cultural referential function, as a reference to the culture of a community or ethnic group (eg, as the language in social or ceremonial language); and mythic or religious function, as the language used in the realm of religion or belief (eg in religious ceremonies, mythology, or proselytizing) (cf. Gobard 1976).

Referential-cultural function and mythic function is never used as a benchmark in the analysis of language shift and maintenance. In fact, the oral tradition in some communities carry out both functions of language. *Lego-lego* of Kui people is a translation of the cultural-referential function and mythic. In the *lego-lego* contained mythological origins and ancestors of Kui people. In fact, the performers in practice of *lego-lego* depends on the particular clan. It was a rule accepted and considered as ancestors heritage.

Conclusion

My preliminary research of indicated that *lego-lego* is the medium of social structure guard of Kui people. In the oral tradition, the Kui people has the collective memory of who they are as people and who Kui people themselves as a clan. Material culture, especially the clothing, helped to keep the Kui people's collective memory. Here there is a reciprocal relationship between *lego-lego* as an oral tradition with the mythological origins and material culture.

This paper did not analysis of communicative vehicle used to express *lego-lego* as suggested Bauman (1975: 15-24) and Foley (1995: 53), which is a special code, figurative language, parallelism, features of para-linguistics, special formula, appeal to tradition and disclaimer of performance. Analysis of communicative vehicle will be done if the transcription on documenting *lego-lego* completed.

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